

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Department of State

DEPT PASS:

ABIDJAN, FORT LAMY, KINSHASA, LIBREVILLE, MONROVIA,
PARIS, SAIGON, TEL AVIV, YAOUNDE

FROM

Amembassy BANGUI

DATE: March 2, 1971

SUBJECT:

Semimonthly Roundup No. 4, February 15-28, 1971

REF

Highlights

The last half of February was marked by the GOCAR's continued drive to emphasize its close relations with the United States. In this euphoric atmosphere President Bokassa abolished visa requirements for Americans, gave red-carpet treatment to visiting CODEL Diggs, and awarded a prize telecommunications contract to an American firm over French competition. The French Ambassador presented his credentials after waiting three weeks. (LOU)

ITEM

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GROUP 3

Downgraded at 12-year intervals;
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State Dept. review completed

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1. CAR Abolishes Visa Requirement for Americans (BANGUI 224, 232, 233)

In a move intended as a gesture of friendship toward the United States as well as a practical encouragement to American tourists, President BOKASSA signed on February 26 a decree relieving American citizens of the requirement for visas to enter and reside in the CAR. The importance of the decree was underlined by the President's reading it himself over the radio and by the broadcasting immediately afterwards of an editorial praising the United States and its citizens. The decree was extended to cover Liberians. (UNCL)

COMMENT: The Ambassador has several times suggested to President Bokassa and to the Secretary of State for Tourism the necessity for liberalizing CAR visa procedures to make travel to this country more attractive to American tourists. During his audience with the President (see Section 2 below), Congressman DIGGS also expressed the hope that the CAR would revise its visa procedures. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the Embassy privately that the application of this decree to Liberian citizens was in response to a request made to the GOCAR before the arrival of the Liberian Ambassador in January 1971. (LOU)

2. Visit of CODEL Diggs (BANGUI 174, 207, 214, 228, 237, A-34)

Congressman Charles C. Diggs, Junior, Chairman of the House Sub-Committee on Africa, arrived in Bangui on February 23 for a 3 1/2-day visit on a study tour taking him to a number of African countries. The Congressman was received by President Bokassa on February 24 and was honored at a presidential reception the same day and at a presidential dinner on February 26. The President also provided a government escort for the Congressman's overnight trip to up-country American missionary stations. In his audience with the President, the Congressman suggested the desirability of GOCAR action to facilitate the entry of American tourists (see Section 1 above) and to resolve its dispute with the American-owned Diamond Distributors Incorporated. The President indicated his intention to act soon on both points raised by the Congressman. (CONF)

COMMENT: President Bokassa, still in the strong pro-US posture he assumed on the arrival of the new American Ambassador, went all-out to make a favorable impression on Congressman Diggs, who in turn convinced Bokassa of his sincere interest in the CAR and of his desire to see an increase in US assistance. (LOU)

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3. US Firm Lands CAR Telecommunications Contract (BANGUI 197, 198, A-28, A-32)

On February 20 President Bokassa signed with Henry A. BOGUSLAWSKI of American-owned Tele-Projects, Incorporated, a convention awarding the American firm a \$13.5 million contract for constructing a high-capacity microwave system connecting major CAR urban centers with each other and with the Cameroonian network constructed by the same company. The contract is subject to the availability of external financing, which both parties hope to arrange through the EXIM Bank. (UNCL)

COMMENT: President Bokassa's action in awarding this important infrastructure contract to an American firm, in the face of strong pressure from the French firm Thomson, is attributable to his current desire to encourage American investment in the CAR. (LOU)

4. French Ambassador Presents Credentials

French Ambassador Laurent GIOVANGRANDI, who arrived in Bangui on February 1, presented his credentials to President Bokassa on February 22. (UNCL)

COMMENT: The delay in scheduling the credentials ceremony was caused by President Bokassa's desire to determine beforehand whether the new French Ambassador, who last served as Consul General in Saigon, had been involved in documenting the Vietnamese girl Mlle BAXI who arrived in Bangui in November 1970 alleging to be Bokassa's long-lost daughter Martine. The President was apparently satisfied by the French Government's explanation to the CAR Foreign Minister, who traveled to Paris for that purpose, that Giovangrandi had left Saigon before the French Consulate General became involved in the Martine affair. (CONF)

5. Bokassa Marks 50th Birthday by Acts of Clemency: Martine Affair Ends Happily

On the eve of his fiftieth birthday (February 22), General Bokassa announced two acts of presidential clemency. In the first, relating to Mlle Baxi alias Martine-I (see Section 4 above), Bokassa asked the Vietnamese Charge d'Affaires to request the South Vietnamese authorities to free the girl's imprisoned parents and then declared that Mlle Baxi, who was facing a military trial in Bangui on suspicion of espionage, would be liberated and raised as a member of the President's family. In the second act of clemency, Bokassa rehabilitated former Minister Guillaume MOKEMAT-KENGUEMBA, jailed earlier in the month for irregularities in the conduct of the Ministry of Construction and Equipment, and Lt. YAKOBONDE, believed to have been imprisoned in 1966 for having opposed Bokassa's coup d'etat in January that year. (UNCL)

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COMMENT: Bokassa's dramatic about-face on the disposition of the bogus Martine removes what threatened to be a lingering irritant in Franco-Vietnamese relations. Each side had implied that the other was responsible for having documented Mlle Baxi as the President's daughter. (CONF)

6. Presidential Travel: Ivory Coast, France, Greece, Israel

President Bokassa departed Bangui on February 27 for an eight-day official visit to the Ivory Coast. The GOCAR announced the same day Bokassa's receipt of an invitation from President POMPIDOU for a private visit to France beginning March 20. Bokassa has indicated privately that he will also visit Greece (dates unspecified) and Israel in June this year. (LOU)


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